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Théodore Rousseau's *View of Mont Blanc, Seen from La Faucille*

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New Discoveries

Théodore Rousseau's *View of Mont Blanc, Seen from La Faucille* by Simon Kelly

At the 1867 Salon, Théodore Rousseau (1812–67) exhibited his panoramic *View of Mont Blanc, Seen from La Faucille* (fig. 1).^[1] For the artist's close friend and early biographer, Alfred Sensier, this picture was “one of the most beautiful pages of modern art.”^[2] Another early commentator, Théophile Silvestre, described the work as the artist's “first emotion, and his last painting.”^[3] *View of Mont Blanc*, indeed, may be seen as the crowning result of Rousseau's obsessive research in the last years of his life.



Fig. 1, Théodore Rousseau, *View of Mont Blanc, Seen from La Faucille*, 1863-1867. Oil on canvas. Private Collection (on loan to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts). [\[larger image\]](#)

View of Mont Blanc, Seen from La Faucille is the painting currently on loan from an American private collection to the Minneapolis Institute of Art. Although this work is not strictly a “new discovery”—it has been on loan to Minneapolis and on display there since 1979—its existence has been overlooked in the recent literature about Rousseau where it has been described as lost.^[4] This article aims to highlight the importance of this essentially unpublished picture.

View of Mont Blanc has a prestigious provenance which can be traced back to the artist's lifetime. It passed through the collections of Adèle de Cassin (who became Marquise Landolfo-Carcano by marriage in 1889) and the famed Minneapolis collector James J. Hill, whose descendants own the work today. The work was photographed at a very early stage by the Alsatian photographer, Adolphe Braun, in the late 1860s, and was also reproduced in the catalogue of the 1912 Landolfo-Carcano sale (fig. 2).^[5] As we shall see, this painting is a major example of Rousseau's controversial and largely misunderstood late landscape vision. It represents a significant addition to our understanding of an artist whose oeuvre has recently begun to attract increasing scholarly and public attention.^[6]



Fig. 2, Anonymous, after Théodore Rousseau, *View of Mont Blanc, Seen from La Faucille (Le Col de la Faucille)* in *Collection de Madame la Marquise Landolfo-Carcano* (Paris Georges Petit, 1912). Photograph. Spencer Art Reference Library, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City. [\[larger image\]](#)

View of Mont Blanc, Seen from la Faucille highlights the importance of the iconography of mountains for Rousseau, an artist generally associated with views of the forest of Fontainebleau but who also represented the mountain ranges of the Alps, Auvergne, Jura, and Pyrenees intermittently throughout his career. Rousseau visited the Alps twice and, as early as 1847, was presented in public as an Alpine mountaineer by his critical apologist, Théophile Thoré.^[7] The Minneapolis picture represents an expansive vista looking south-east from the Col de la Faucille in the Jura region. This vantage point offers one of the most spectacular views of the Mont Blanc mountain range and was well known in tourist literature of the time. Rousseau represents the configuration of the mountains with great accuracy and the peaks around Mont Blanc can each be individually identified.^[8] The modulated shadows in the mountains are carefully rendered as are the curving banks of Lake Geneva (also known as Lake Lemman) and the red roofs of the city of Geneva.^[9] Further forward are vineyards on the plains and hills dotted with firs while a cobbled road—the pass of la Faucille—snakes around, initially at foreground right, before appearing at left and crossing the composition in the center. Rousseau rarely included themes of modern technology in his work but this road is lined with telegraph poles, alluding to its role as a principal communications route between France and Switzerland in the mid-nineteenth century. At bottom right, three tiny figures look up at three distant birds.^[10] The small size of the figures contributes to the impression of the immensity of the panoramic view. At bottom left, the work is signed prominently in red.^[11]

Recent years have witnessed a growing awareness of the wide range of representations of the Alps not only in the medium of paintings but also in prints, photographs, panoramas and dioramas.^[12] Although Rousseau's *View of Mont Blanc, Seen from la Faucille* has attracted little attention, there has been analysis of the artist's wider interest in the Alps. Greg M. Thomas has explored the meanings of Rousseau's mountain views in terms of the artist's "ecological vision" which he sees as the overriding force in Rousseau's career.^[13] He suggests that "most significant" for the artist was the knowledge that Mont Blanc and its Alpine glaciers served as the nourishing source for many of France's rivers.^[14] Rousseau—

an artist whose career and output had an inherently nationalistic focus, as his landscapes were exclusively of French sites—was probably especially sensitive to the nationalistic resonances surrounding Mont Blanc in the 1860s. Once part of France, the mountain had passed to the ownership of the kingdom of Sardinia in 1814. In the spring of 1860, however, it returned to France as part of a wider annexation of the Savoy region. This event attracted much coverage in the press and an unpublished letter from Alfred Sensier indicates that it was a subject of interest in the Barbizon community.^[15] In March, 1861, a treaty signed in Turin by France and Italy established that the border between the two countries passed directly through the summit of Mont Blanc. An examination of Rousseau's obsessive working practice at the same time on *View of Mont Blanc* indicates that the artist was also focused on formal issues and especially the resolution of complex questions relating to facture and light within his landscape.

Rousseau worked intermittently in his Parisian Cité Malesherbes studio on the *View of Mont Blanc* from 1863 until 1867. The work had been commissioned by the Alsatian industrialist, Alfred Hartmann, the younger brother of Frédéric, Rousseau's long-suffering and most crucial patron of the Second Empire, for the very large sum of 24,000 francs.^[16] Rousseau had already spent several weeks at La Faucille years before in 1834 and then produced a dramatic large-scale storm scene from a similar viewpoint to the Minneapolis picture (fig. 3). In order to confirm his early memories, however, he decided to visit the same location again in September, 1863, in the company of a young Franche-Comtais friend, Jules Gros. The fall season offered a good time for accurate observation and he wrote of the importance of seeing the mountains "distinctly" which he considered largely impossible in the "luminous haze" of midsummer.^[17] During this trip, Rousseau produced at least twenty drawings in addition to watercolors, generally from various viewpoints around the Col de la Faucille.^[18] These recorded a range of temporal and weather effects from scenes of calm to thunderstorms and clear skies to rainbows. As a group, they serve as evidence of an intensive effort to understand the geology and light effects of the Alps mountain range. Rousseau's interest in the geological structure of mountains dated from the beginning of his career. His interest in meticulously documenting the Alps is evident in a pencil drawing in the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen (fig. 4). Other drawings are more focused on dramatic chiaroscuro effects. In one example, he represents a storm scene with a transition from dark foreground pine trees through shadowed mountains to distant brighter peaks. Another shows a light effect very similar to the Minneapolis work.^[19] Shortly after leaving La Faucille, Rousseau wrote to his patron Frédéric Hartmann that he had "never seen the elements as unchained" and that he had witnessed "magnificent although terrible spectacles."^[20] He made reference to his satisfaction that his "observation notes after nature" agreed with "the composition I had planned."^[21]



Fig. 3, Théodore Rousseau, *Mont Blanc, Seen from La Faucille, thunderstorm*, 1834. Oil on canvas. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen. Photo Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 4, Théodore Rousseau, *Chain of Alps*, 1863. Pencil on paper. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. [\[larger image\]](#)

According to Sensier, Rousseau began his *View of Mont Blanc* on his return to Paris and used a novel technique of a preparatory layer of watercolor to achieve an enhanced tonal luminosity after being impressed by Old Master watercolor practice.^[22] Technical analysis has not confirmed this but Rousseau's oil technique—particularly in his distant mountains—does approximate watercolor. Thus, he drew his oil paint across his canvas in very thin, near transparent layers and then offset this by opaque touches, similar to gouache, particularly for the whites of the mountain tops. Sensier noted that Rousseau also initially outlined his composition in pen and ink. This underdrawing is clearly evident when the work is viewed in an infra-red reflectogram, which also makes it possible to see the configuration of the foreground hills, which are now difficult to make out with the naked eye (fig. 5).^[23] Rousseau developed *View of Mont Blanc* on a canvas of a size (90 x 117cm) that he favored in his late work.^[24]



Fig. 5, Infra-red reflectogram of Théodore Rousseau, *View of Mont Blanc, Seen from La Faucille*. Oil on canvas. Private Collection (on loan to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts). [\[larger image\]](#)

Rousseau built up the surfaces of the mid-ground fields and densely forested foreground hills with a meticulous, additive process of uniform flecks of green applied with a pointed brush, thus creating an almost “woven” or stitched effect (fig. 6).^[25] This technique may have been informed by Japanese prints and particularly Hokusai’s many views of Mount Fuji with their dotted treatment of fir trees, as in *Red Fuji* (fig. 7). Rousseau’s “proto-pointillist” method contrasts markedly with his earlier far more gestural handling—as in the 1834 Alps view (fig. 3)—which was often viewed as a marker of individual “temperament,” and perhaps signified a search for a more impersonal technique.^[26] Rousseau never fully explained the rationale behind this approach but it may have represented an effort to create a sense of meditated permanence, less evident in a rapid, spontaneous touch. His personal stylistic evolution can be seen as anticipating that moment some two decades later in the mid-1880s as the young neo-Impressionists explored a uniform facture as a critique of the seemingly random brushwork of the older Impressionists.

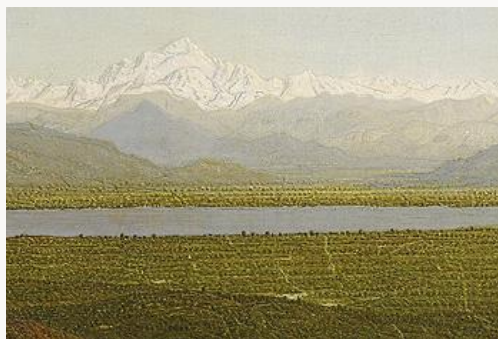


Fig. 6, Detail of central area of Théodore Rousseau, *View of Mont Blanc, Seen from La Faucille*. Oil on canvas. Private Collection (on loan to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts). [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 7, Katsushika Hokusai, 'South Wind, Clear Sky' (Gaifu kaisei) ['Red Fuji']. From the series 'Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji' (Fugaku sanju-rokkei). Woodblock print. British Museum, London. Photo © The Trustees of The British Museum/ Art Resource, NY. [\[larger image\]](#)

Rousseau continued to work intermittently on *View of Mont Blanc* through 1864–66, consistently putting off plans for exhibition of the painting at the Salon.^[27] His restless revision seems to have arrived at a pivotal moment during the winter of 1866/67. Unpublished correspondence between Alfred Sensier and the Barbizon painter Jean-François Millet indicates that he made substantial changes to his picture at this time. On January 23, 1867, Sensier noted that he had recently visited Rousseau's studio and found the painting "transformed" and that he was "stunned by such a great and beautiful thing."^[28] Although Sensier did not specify the changes, it is probable that he was referring to Rousseau's decision to darken his foreground, thus creating a marked contrast with his luminous distance. Similar effects can be seen, indeed, in contemporary photographs by Charles Soulier.^[29] Although Rousseau did not discuss his intentions for the Alps view in his correspondence, other letters that he wrote reveal his obsession in his late career with intense light effects. While the artist's late interest in exploring the light of the South, evident in his Landes views, has been noted, this painting highlights his similar approach in his rendering of the Alps.^[30] The intense ultramarine blue of the sky transitioning down into blonder tones is especially notable. In his late correspondence, Rousseau placed his attitude to light within a broader metaphysical framework and noted that his interest in a "luminous expression" reflected for him a universal truth behind appearances.^[31]

Rousseau's artist friends pressured him to exhibit *View of Mont Blanc* and, by January, 1867, Jean-François Millet was hoping that he would finish it for the following Salon since it "cannot fail to arouse good and strong sensations." Millet himself was particularly admiring of Rousseau's treatment of the distant mountain range.^[32] Ultimately, Rousseau did show it at the 1867 Salon, submitting it only at the very last minute, after the Salon livret had already been printed. The picture, therefore, did not appear in the official booklet. *View of Mont Blanc, Seen from la Faucille*, the only Alps view that Rousseau ever showed at the Salon, was exhibited with a forest scene, *Forest Interior* (Musée d'Orsay), dating from the late 1830s.^[33] Sensier later noted that Rousseau's exhibits were largely overlooked by critics who concentrated on the much larger exhibition of French painting at the Exposition Universelle. Yet, Rousseau's mountain scene did in fact receive considerable attention from critics who focused above all not on his subject, but on his technique which invariably they found perplexing. The young avant-garde critic, Emile Zola, for example, described

Rousseau's method as a "mystery" and wondered whether he used "brushes," or "penknives" and "small sticks." Perhaps, Zola speculated, he used all these instruments at the same time. [34] Both conservative and avant-garde critics struggled to find a language to describe Rousseau's unconventional technique, often comparing his works to foodstuff or to types of cloth. Rousseau's trees were repeatedly likened to "brussels sprouts," probably an allusion to the way in which they seemed to be transformed within the expansive panorama into small, rounded points. [35] Others compared Rousseau's meticulously flecked paint surfaces to a woven or knitted piece of fabric, employing a critical trope that had surrounded his work from the early 1860s. Théophile Thoré described his picture as "knitted like a tapestry fragment, with uniform stitches." [36] The caricaturist Bertall conflated these culinary and clothing associations in his schematic caricature (fig. 8) and even suggested that Rousseau's surfaces might serve as the model for the silk ribbon to accompany the artists' medals at the Exposition Universelle. [37] Other comparisons were even more unusual and informed by the interests of individual critics. For Maxime Du Camp, a writer and critic fascinated by the ancient world, Rousseau's surfaces were comparable to "opus reticulatum," a kind of Roman masonry made up of diamond-shaped bricks. [38]



Fig. 8, Bertall [Charles- Albert d'Arnoux], "Les Choux de Bruxelles" from "Le Salon Dépeint par Bertall," *Le Journal Amusant*, June 1, 1867. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. [\[larger image\]](#)

While discourse around Rousseau focused on his facture, critics also referenced his unusual light effect. Du Camp, in particular, noted the transition from the foreground "with near blackish green tones" through "successive and virtually imperceptible transitions" to the "snowy whiteness" of the Alps. He considered the "effect" to be "captivating initially" but with no lasting impact. He expressed admiration for Rousseau's efforts to produce an "original" work but advised that the picture would have been more impressive if the approach had been "more simple and naïve." [39] Although Rousseau's supporter, Philippe Burty, described the artist's treatment of his mountains as "one of the last words in modern painting" he was also unable to comprehend the artist's darkening of the foreground which he, like Du Camp, saw as exaggerated and lacking in naturalism. He noted that "nothing justifies" this shadow and added that the earlier overall blond effect "was initially more masterly and true." [40] Yet, despite such criticism, Rousseau's use of shadow can be seen as a quite legitimate effort to render in paint the Alpine region's intense chiaroscuro effects.

View of Mont Blanc, Seen from la Faucille, in conclusion, is an important late work in Rousseau's oeuvre and demonstrates the significance he ascribed to the rendering of mountains, particularly in expansive and panoramic views. In addition to its iconographical interest, the Minneapolis painting, with its marked chiaroscuro effect and complex "proto-pointillist" facture that so confused the critics at the Salons of the Second Empire, presents an example of Rousseau's unorthodox late technique. For these reasons, it considerably enhances our understanding of this restless and obsessively experimental artist.

Provenance:[41] Commissioned from Théodore Rousseau by Alfred Hartmann in 1862 or 1863; bought by Paul Durand-Ruel and Hector Brame from Alfred Hartmann in February, 1867 for 14,300 francs (see Durand-Ruel stockbooks, *Vue de Suisse*, no. 10,142); sold by Durand-Ruel and Brame to Chevalier de Knyff in February, 1867 for 18,000 francs; bought back by Durand-Ruel and Brame from de Knyff on December 16, 1867 for 18,000 francs; sold by Durand-Ruel and Brame to Francis Petit for Madame Adèle De Cassin (who subsequently became the Marquise Landolfo-Carcano) for 20,000 francs in April, 1868 (see Durand-Ruel stockbooks, *Vue de Suisse*, no. 10,603); sold at the Marquise Landolfo-Carcano sale (Galerie Georges Petit, Paris) to M. Knoedler and Co. on May 30, 1912 for \$13,500; sold to James J. Hill in 1912 for \$31,500 as *Le Col de la Faucille* (inv. 251); Louis W. Hill, Sr., G. Norman Slade, Mr. and Mrs. James W. Slade.

Exhibition history

Salon of 1867 (*Vue du Mont Blanc, prise de la Faucille (Jura)- appartient à M. A. de Knyff*);

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Notes

Thanks for their help to my colleagues at The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Patrick Noon and Sue Canterbury. All translations are by the author.

[1] The work has subsequently received various titles. Théophile Thoré described it as *View of Vineyards in Savoy with the chain of the Alps on the horizon (Vue de vignes en savoie, avec la chaîne des Alpes à l'horizon)*. In the 1912 Landolfo-Carcano sale catalogue, it was listed as *Col de la Faucille*. While on loan to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, it has been entitled *Lake Geneva*.

[2] "une des plus belles pages de l'art moderne et comme le témoignage d'un des efforts les plus prodigieux qu'ait réalisés un peintre pour reproduire non pas un motif de paysage, mais tout l'ensemble d'une contrée héroïque vivante de la vie des immensités, sous la loi bienfaisante de la lumière." See Alfred Sensier, *Souvenirs sur Théodore Rousseau* (Paris, Techener, 1872), 296.

[3] "...sa première émotion et son dernier tableau..." See Théophile Silvestre, 'L'Oeuvre posthume de Théodore Rousseau' in *Catalogue de la Vente qui aura lieu par suite du décès de Théodore Rousseau* (Paris, Hôtel Drouot, April 27–May 2, 1868), 26.

[4] Michel Schulman references this work and describes it as "localisation inconnue." See Michel Schulman, *Théodore Rousseau, 1812–1867, Catalogue Raisonné de l'Oeuvre Peint* (Paris: Les Éditions de l'Amateur, 1999), no. 678. Schulman's catalogue entry provides an incorrect photograph, duplicating that in his previous entry (no. 677). Greg M. Thomas also references the painting and gives information on its early history. He says that the location is unknown although he does indicate that Hélène Toussaint and Marie Thérèse de Forges state that the painting is in an American collection. See Greg M. Thomas, *Art and Ecology in Nineteenth-*

Century France: The Landscapes of Théodore Rousseau (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), Appendix A, 202 and 207.

[5] See Braun's projected (but ultimately unpublished) catalogue of Rousseau's oeuvre in the Archives Braun, Mulhouse. *Catalogue Rousseau*, no. 108. See also *Collection de Madame la Marquise Landolfo-Carcano* (Paris: Galerie Georges Petit, May, 30–June 1, 1912), no. 71, 85. The painting is also reproduced and briefly discussed in Prosper Dorbec, "L'Oeuvre de Th. Rousseau aux Salons de 1849 à 1867," *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 55th year, vol. 9 (February, 1913), 125–26.

[6] See, for example, the attention that Rousseau's work attracted in the recent National Gallery of Art show in Washington, D.C., *In the Forest of Fontainebleau: Painters and Photographers from Corot to Monet*. See also the recent acquisitions by American museums including *Sunset on the Sands of Jean de Paris* by the Wadsworth Athenaeum and *Forest of Fontainebleau* by the Getty Museum, Los Angeles. For the latter, see Mary G. Morton, "Théodore Rousseau's *Forest of Fontainebleau*" in *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 7, no. 1, (Spring, 2008), http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/spring_08/articles/newd_mort.shtml, (accessed April 5, 2008). More recently, the work is reproduced in Jane H. Hancock, Sheila FFolliott, and Thomas O'Sullivan, eds., *Homecoming: The Art Collection of James J. Hill* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1991), 93 and pl. 15.

[7] In the context of his description of an expedition in the forest of Fontainebleau, Thoré described Rousseau as "ce brave compagnon des longues courses à pied, le jour et la nuit, par tous les temps, au travers des pays les plus sauvages. Rousseau a descendu [sic] le Saint Bernard, en hiver, les pieds dans la neige, le sac sur le dos, dix-huit lieues sans s'arrêter... Rousseau a visité, avec cette intrépidité fanatique qui exige une passion de fou et des jarrets d'acier, les Alpes et les Pyrénées. Vous jugez que la forêt de Fontainebleau lui semble comme un petit jardin de prédilection." See Théophile Thoré. "Par Monts et par Bois. La forêt de Fontainebleau," *Le Constitutionnel*, November 27, 1847.

[8] Just to the left of Mont Blanc, Rousseau carefully renders (from right to left) Mont Maudit, Mont Blanc du Tacul and the Aiguille du Midi.

[9] To the left, Rousseau represents the curving shores around the towns of Yvoire and Excenevex.

[10] According to information in the curatorial file at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the work was known in the owner's family as Three Magpies.

[11] Craquelure passes through the signature indicating that this was made at the same time as the painting. The pigment particles of ultramarine blue in the sky and red lake when seen under the microscope are coarse rather than fine, also indicating the pigment is not a finely ground, commercially prepared, modern product. When seen under ultraviolet there are few areas of re-touching, although it is possible that a passage of paint on the lake at the far left may have been added at a later stage. Thanks to conservators Joan Gorman and David Marquis for this information. Schulman says that the work is dated at lower left 1855, surely drawing on the same information which is included in the Landolfo-Carcano catalogue. This date, however, is not visible in the Minneapolis private collection's work, nor would it, in any event, square with the circumstances of the work's commission. There is, in fact, no date visible in the Minneapolis picture, nor does infra-red reflectography indicate there to be any trace of a date.

[12] Perhaps the artist most identified with representations of the Alps was the Swiss painter, Alexandre Calame, who exhibited views of the Alps regularly at the Salon. See the recent exhibition catalogue, Alberto de Andrés, *Alpine Views. Alexandre Calame and the Swiss Landscape* (Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, 2006). From the 1850s, French photographers such as the Bisson frères and Edouard Baldus also often represented the Alps, producing works which responded to a growing market for these images. A significant industry in print representations of the Alps also developed, largely in response to emergent tourism in the region.

[13] See Thomas, *Art and Ecology*, 115–29.

[14] "Most significant for Rousseau's ecological thoughts, however, was the recognition in guidebooks that Alpine glaciers were the source of many of Europe's rivers...Mont Blanc was appreciated in part as a kind of sublime organism gathering and storing snow, melting it into water and enriching it with minerals, and leaking it into the holding basin of Lake Geneva, from which it flowed through France and into the oceans." *Ibid.*, 125–26.

[15] On June 14, 1860, Alfred Sensier wrote to Millet, "Tout Paris est en fête pour l'Annexion de la Savoie; grande revue, drapeaux, oriflammes jusque sur les urinoirs; c'est un tapage affreux."

Sensier to Millet, June 14, 1860. Département des Arts Graphiques, Musée du Louvre, Aut. 2527.

[16] The nature of this “commission” is somewhat confusing. Initially, in the spring of 1862, Alfred Hartmann agreed to buy two works by Rousseau, the *Four Communal* (Leipzig Museum) and *Le Village de Becquigny* (Frick Collection, New York) for 12,000 francs each. At some point thereafter (probably in early 1863), Alfred's brother, Frédéric, assumed responsibility for these works, making a new payment to the artist. Rousseau subsequently produced the slightly larger *View of Mont Blanc* for Alfred as a substitute for the *Four Communal* and *Village de Becquigny* which were now to be delivered to Frédéric. The artist's first reference to the picture comes in a letter to Frédéric of October 17, 1863 in which he refers to “le tableau des Alpes de votre frère [my italics]” (cited in Sensier, *Souvenirs*, 294). For the patronage of the Hartmanns, see Simon Kelly, “The Patronage of Frédéric Hartmann and the Question of Finish,” *The Burlington Magazine* 142, no. 1170 (September, 2000): 549–60 (esp. 559, letter 16).

[17] Rousseau wrote to his wife, “Septembre est la bonne époque pour voir les montagnes, lointaines par la trop grande chaleur. On ne voit qu'une brume lumineuse et j'ai besoin de les dessiner nettement.” Rousseau to Elisa Gros, August 24, 1863. Département des Arts Graphiques, Musée du Louvre, Aut. 3751 (cited in Valentine de Chillaz, *Inventaire Général des Autographes. Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques* [Paris, Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1997], 414).

[18] At present, we know of seven drawings in pencil and charcoal and one watercolor with white heightening. For these drawings, see Michel Schulman (with the collaboration of Marie Bataillès et Virginie Sérafino), *Théodore Rousseau (1812–1867): Catalogue Raisonné de l'Oeuvre Graphique* (Paris: Editions de l'Amateur - Editions des Catalogues Raisonnés, 1997), nos. 709–16. Many of Rousseau's Alps drawings are now lost. Twenty-one preparatory drawings appeared in Rousseau's studio 1868 sale. See *Catalogue de la Vente qui aura lieu par suite du décès de Théodore Rousseau* (Paris, Hôtel Drouot, April 27–May 2, 1868), Lot 416, *Etudes pour le tableau du Mont-Blanc. Dix dessins. 1863*, and Lot 418, *Etudes dans le Jura & pour le tableau du Mont-Blanc. Cinq dessins. 1863*. Six related drawings of the Alps are listed in individual lots: 223, *Vue de l'extrémité orientale de la chaîne du mont Blanc* (pen and ink), 224, *Vue des Alpes & du lac de Genève [Le mont Blanc est en partie caché par les nuages]*, 225, *Vue prise de la Faucille. Le lac de Genève est caché par les premiers plans*, 231, *Vallée dans le Jura. On aperçoit une partie de la chaîne du mont Blanc à travers deux escarpements de rochers*, 232, *Vue de la chaîne du mont Blanc avec la route tournante de la Faucille* (possibly the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum drawing), 236, *Le mont Blanc & le lac de Genève; vue de la Faucille*. Rousseau also produced another panoramic painting of the Alps, perhaps as a sketch and perhaps also during the course of this visit. This is now also lost. See Schulman, *Catalogue Raisonné de l'Oeuvre Peint*, no. 677.

[19] See Schulman, *Catalogue Raisonné de l'Oeuvre Graphique*, no. 711.

[20] ‘...Je n'ai jamais vu les éléments aussi déchaînés. J'en reviens seulement parce qu'il m'a fallu un long temps pour conquérir mes matériaux à travers les intempéries, et de plus un assez grand courage, je vous assure, pour le faire, en aggravant chaque jour la souffrance résultant d'une foulure à la jambe que je me suis faite au début de ce voyage. Je dirais malheureux voyage si je n'en avais rapporté ce qui compense tout cela à mes yeux. D'abord, j'ai vu de magnifiques quoique terribles spectacles...’ Rousseau to Frédéric Hartmann, October 17, 1863. Cited in Sensier, *Souvenirs*, 293

[21] ‘...j'ai lieu de regarder mon tableau comme fait sous une heureuse inspiration, toutes mes notes d'observations sur la nature pouvant bien concorder avec la disposition d'ensemble que j'avais arrêtée; aussi ai-je hâte de retrouver mon atelier...’ Rousseau to Frédéric Hartmann, October 17, 1863. Cited in Sensier, *Souvenirs*, 293

[22] See Sensier, *Souvenirs*, 295–96. Sensier does not elaborate on which Old Master works Rousseau had seen. It is possible that the artist may have visited the Salle des Boîtes at the Louvre. Sensier himself visited in October, 1866 and described a watercolor by Albert Dürer as follows: “un magnifique portrait de vieillard par Albert Durer. C'est une peinture à l'eau, qui a la vie incarnée jusque dans les plus intimes détails, des yeux à vous faire peur et une bouche d'où sort l'haleine tiède de la poitrine: c'est effrayant.” See Sensier to Millet, 22 October, 1866, Département des Arts Graphiques, Musée du Louvre, Aut. 2829.

[23] Conservator David Marquis has suggested that these outlines may be thin paint rather than pen-and-ink. It is possible that Rousseau's foreground area may have darkened with time or is obscured by aged, discolored varnish layers.

[24] According to Sensier, the *View of Mont Blanc* was painted on a wood panel. Sensier, *Souvenirs*. 295. Sensier's memories were, however, as here, often inaccurate.

[25] The picture was re-lined in 1966 at The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art by the conservator James Roth which has probably flattened the surface a little.

[26] For Théophile Thoré, Rousseau self-consciously “effaced” his personality in this late style. See Théophile Thoré, “Salon de 1864” in *Salons de W. Burger, 1861 à 1868*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1870), 75.

[27] In the fall of 1863, he noted his plan to exhibit his Mont Blanc view at the following Salon: ‘J’aurai à l’Exposition prochaine du printemps le Village [Frick Collection] et le Tableau des Alpes, de votre frère, car on ne peut mettre plus de deux tableaux.’ Rousseau to Frédéric Hartmann, October 17, 1863. Cited in Sensier, *Souvenirs*, 293.

[28] “Je vous dirai que j’ai vu le tableau de la Faucille de Rousseau. Je le trouve transformé, et je m’y attendais; mais je n’espérais pas une si grande et belle chose. J’en ai été abasourdi.” See Alfred Sensier to Jean-François Millet, January 23, 1867. Département des Arts Graphiques, Musée du Louvre. Aut. 2847.

[29] See, for example, Soulier’s *Mont Blanc, Savoy* (1869) in Bonnie L. Grad and Timothy A. Riggs, *Visions of City and Country: Prints and Photographs of Nineteenth-Century France* (Worcester: Worcester Art Museum and The American Federation of Arts, 1982), 91. I am not suggesting here that Rousseau was “influenced” in any way by photography, but rather noting the similarity of the modes of vision.

[30] See Simon Kelly, “‘Ferme dans les Landes’: A Re-discovered Painting by Théodore Rousseau,” *The Burlington Magazine* 142, no. 1184 (November, 2001): 687–90. For Rousseau’s obsessive late working method, see also Greg M. Thomas, “The Practice of Naturalism”: The Working Methods of Théodore Rousseau,” in Andreas Burmester, Christoph Heilmann, and Michael F. Zimmermann, eds., *Barbizon: Malerier der Natur-Natur der Malerei* (Munich: Klinkhardt and Biermann, 1999), 139–52.

[31] See Sensier, *Souvenirs*, 280

[32] Millet wrote to Sensier on January 27, 1867, “Je suis bien content de ce que vous me dites sur le tableau de Rousseau. Les fonds de montagnes étaient superbes la dernière fois que je l’ai vu [*sic*], et ils m’ont fait penser des choses analogues à celles que vous m’en dites. Je souhaite bien qu’il ait le temps de le terminer pour l’Exposition, car ce beau tableau ne peut pas manquer d’exciter de bonnes et fortes sensations.” Département des Arts Graphiques, Musée du Louvre, Aut. 2155.

[33] Rousseau’s early *Descente des Vaches* (Mesdag Museum) with its view of the Jura Mountains had been refused by the Salon jury twice, in 1836 and 1838.

[34] “On dirait que ce paysagiste prend à tâche d’user toute son énergie à émietter la nature, à changer les collines en cailloux et les arbres en broussailles...La façon dont il peint est encore un mystère pour moi. Se sert-il de pinces, de canifs ou de petits bâtons? Peut-être use-t-il de tous ces instruments à la fois.” See Emile Zola, “Nos Peintres au Champ-de-Mars” in Emile Zola, *Salons*, eds. F.W.J. Hemmings and Robert J. Neiss (Geneva, 1959), 114. .

[35] The conservative writer for *Le Siècle*, Felix Deriège, for example, noted, “Théodore Rousseau...s’amuse maintenant à peindre d’immense panorama, ce qui le mène à transformer ses villages en maisons de Nuremberg et ses arbres en choux de Bruxelles.” Félix Deriège, “Salon de 1867,” *Le Siècle*, June 13, 1867.

[36] “Nous trouverons plus tard, au Salon des Champs-Élysées, une oeuvre que Rousseau vient de terminer, *Vue de vignes en Savoie, avec la chaîne des Alpes à l’horizon*, et qui appartient je crois, au chevalier de Knyff. C’est tricoté comme un morceau de tapisserie, à point égal.” See Théophile Thoré, “Exposition Universelle de 1867,” in *Salons de W. Bürger, 1861 à 1868*, vol. 2 (Paris: Ve Jules Renouard, 1870), 355

[37] “Les Choux de Bruxelles, tapisserie au petit point, par M. Rousseau. Ce tableau ayant été fort apprécié de la commission, elle a proposé de faire exécuter sur ce modèle le ruban de soie destiné à accompagner les grandes médailles internationales décernées à messieurs les artistes.” Bertall [Charles-Albert d’Arnoux], “Le Salon Dépeint par Bertall,” *Le Journal Amusant*, June 1, 1867.

[38] “M. Théodore Rousseau a fait un grand effort pour produire une oeuvre originale, et je crains qu’il n’ait pas atteint le but qu’il se proposait. Sa *Vue du lac de Genève* (non inscrite au catalogue) a été conçue dans un parti pris trop manifeste. C’est très-fini, modelé ou plutôt pommelé avec un soin rare, mais que de coups de grattoir sur cette peinture pour l’amener à l’effet cherché! A certaines places, la toile apparaît avec son grain régulier et semble de loin une ruine de ces ouvrages en brique que les Romains appelaient opus reticulatum.” Maxime Du Camp, *Les Beaux-Arts à L’Exposition Universelle et aux Salons de 1863, 1864, 1865, 1866 & 1867* (Paris: Ve Jules Renouard, 1867), 286–87. The article initially appeared in the *Revue des deux-mondes*.

[39] “Le système de coloration est tout entier dans une dégradation de nuances qui, commençant au premier plan par des tons d’un vert presque noir, aboutit par couches successives et presque insensibles, aux blancheurs neigeuses de la chaîne des Alpes. L’effet

saisit au premier abord, j'en conviens; mais il faut s'en aller vite sur cette impression et ne pas la raisonner, car elle ne tarderait pas à s'évanouir. Ce tableau néanmoins est très-curieux à étudier, il dénonce une habileté de main, une ténacité dans l'emploi des procédés, une volonté de rendre une idée conçue, qui sont extraordinaires. Seulement on peut croire que l'effet obtenu et été meilleur et plus durable si les moyens mis en usage avaient été plus simples et plus naïfs." Ibid.

[40] "On a connu sa Vue de la chaîne du Mont-Blanc, dont les fonds sont un des derniers mots de la peinture moderne, avant que les premiers plans n'aient été obscurcis par une ombre portée que rien ne légitime. L'effet était primitivement bien plus magistral et vrai." Philippe Burty, "Théodore Rousseau," *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 10th year, vol. 24 (April, 1868), 320

[41] Information regarding the early provenance of this picture draws on my research in the Durand-Ruel archives in Paris in 1993. Thanks to Caroline Godefroy Durand-Ruel for providing access to these archives.

Illustrations



Fig. 1, Théodore Rousseau, *View of Mont Blanc, Seen from La Faucille*, 1863-1867. Oil on canvas. Private Collection (on loan to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts). [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 2, Anonymous, after Théodore Rousseau, *View of Mont Blanc, Seen from La Faucille (Le Col de la Faucille)* in *Collection de Madame la Marquise Landolfo-Carcano* (Paris Georges Petit, 1912). Photograph. Spencer Art Reference Library, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 3, Théodore Rousseau, *Mont Blanc, Seen from La Faucille, thunderstorm*, 1834. Oil on canvas. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen. Photo Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 4, Théodore Rousseau, *Chain of Alps*, 1863. Pencil on paper. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 5, Infra-red reflectogram of Théodore Rousseau, *View of Mont Blanc, Seen from La Faucille*. Oil on canvas. Private Collection (on loan to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts). [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 6, Detail of central area of Théodore Rousseau, *View of Mont Blanc, Seen from La Faucille*. Oil on canvas. Private Collection (on loan to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts). [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 7, Katsushika Hokusai, 'South Wind, Clear Sky' (Gaifu kaisei) ['Red Fuji']. From the series 'Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji' (Fugaku sanju-rokkei). Woodblock print. British Museum, London. Photo © The Trustees of The British Museum/ Art Resource, NY. [\[return to text\]](#)

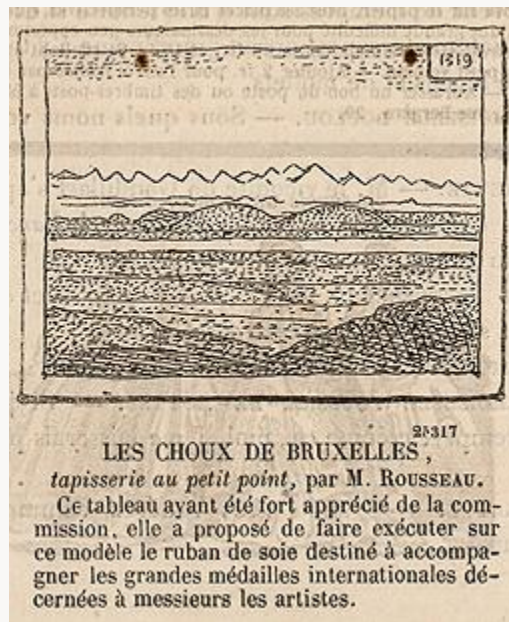


Fig. 8, Bertall [Charles- Albert d'Arnoix], "Les Choux de Bruxelles" from "Le Salon Dépeint par Bertall," *Le Journal Amusant*, June 1, 1867. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. [\[return to text\]](#)